

MEMORANDUM

To: Joshua Lederberg, John Steinbruner, Glenn Schweitzer, Christopher Howson, Jo Husbands, Chuck Fogelgren

From: Matthew Meselson

Subject: Advance Memo for Today's Conference Call

Date: 6 January, 1997

This picks up with John Steinbruner's e-mail of 27 December and addresses some basic questions we need to answer before going much farther in our project.

1) WHAT IS THE ESSENTIAL "ON THE GROUND" COMPONENT OF OUR PROJECT?

John's memo and my e-mail of 24 December agree that the project's essential component is direct collaboration in research work between scientists at MoD and DoD biological defense research facilities.

2) WHAT ARE THE INTENDED BENEFITS OF ACHIEVING SUCH COLLABORATION?

These include increased transparency, creation of informal channels of communication regarding mutual concerns, development of a uniform understanding of what the BWC permits and what it does not, discussion and re-direction of work that might be considered questionable under the BWC, and, very importantly, advances in prophylaxis, diagnosis and therapy of infectious diseases of public health significance. Overall, it is intended that the benefits of what might be called this "track two" approach will facilitate the intergovernmental "track one" efforts in support of the BWC and its strengthening.

3) THROUGH WHAT CHANNEL SHOULD WE APPROACH THE MoD?

Each of us may by now have made inquiries on this point. I asked a person who I regard as highly reliable and who has long-standing involvement and up-to-date connections. The response was, without hesitation, that Kalinin is the key person--not Biopreparat the organization but Kalinin the individual. This is entirely independent of Sherbakov. Pending what others of us may have learned, it appears that we should give an approach to Kalinin our best effort. This will entail some specific preparations on our part to be discussed when we next meet.

4) SHOULD WE PROCEED WITH THE ACCOUNTING AND SURVEILLANCE SCHEMES?

I urge that we drop these components from our project and instead postpone consideration of further transparency measures until ideas can be discussed and developed jointly by participating Americans and Russians. Several considerations lead me to think that we should focus exclusively on the lab-to-lab research component at this time, with Obolensk and Vector

and some collaborating US labs as near-term models but with effort aimed at reciprocal participation by MoD and DoD as soon as possible. My reasons for thinking we should shelve the accountancy and surveillance components are:

A) USG policy strongly opposes the use of definitive agent lists in BW arms control negotiations. By appearing to endorse the concept of such a list, we risk USG withdrawal of support for our project when this comes to the attention of wider circles within government.

B) International negotiating experience shows that attempts to construct BW agent lists generate disagreement and suspicion.

C) Agent lists encourage the incorrect and dangerous view that an agent not on the list cannot be a BW agent. The distinction between potential BW agents and other infectious agents is already blurred and will become much more so with the continued characterization of virulence factors and genomic virulence "cassettes", making it possible to convert many non-pathogens into pathogens.

D) Listing specific agents as potential BW agents can inhibit the reporting of outbreaks. Linkage to BW will make local and national authorities more reluctant to report an outbreak than they otherwise would be. The organizational basis for reporting outbreaks should be linked entirely to public health, not to BW issues.

E) Agent accountancy and BW-linked surveillance are politically sensitive issues the inclusion of which will imperil MoD willingness to participate in the essential lab-to-lab component of our project.

5) HOW SHOULD WE PROCEED IN SEEKING USG GUIDANCE?

It is axiomatic that BW defense facilities are unlikely to work on agents of no relevance to BW defense. Therefore excluding from our project all work on agents relevant to BW defense would exclude the very element of our project that we consider essential -- an absurdly counterproductive situation. Moreover, all classical BW agents are also naturally occurring pathogens of public health importance. We therefor should attempt to broaden our directive from DoD to allow any collaborative research whose impact is clearly limited to prophylaxis, diagnosis or therapy of naturally-occurring disease. We may be helped (or perhaps scooped) in this by the current interest of Detrick in the possibility of inviting Russian biologists from Obolensk to collaborate on an anthrax project or by the activities of DoE. In any case, in revisiting the issue with DoD, we will need some well-written descriptions of specific projects to keep the discussion from being too abstract.

Before going back to DoD, our committee or executive group should meet

with Col. Dave Franz, the Commander at Detrick. He can speak authoritatively to the issue of lab-to-lab collaboration. Since the essential component of our project is MoD/DoD lab-to-lab collaboration, Detrick must be very closely integrated into our effort, more so than at present. The role of CISAC and NAS is that of architect, initiator, facilitator of communication, non-governmental guarantor of scientific quality and transparency, and funding conduit.

The committee or executive group should also meet with Don Mahley at ACDA so as to learn the perspective of that part of the USG that runs the trilateral talks and the BWC negotiations and has thought through many of the problems we will confront and which are not within the purview of the Cooperative Threat Reduction officials.